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ABSTRACT

Community-based organizations (CBOs) are neighborhood-based groups committed to providing human services to poor and minority individuals. The charge that government ineptness generates a need for CBOs is supported by examination of the federal government's operation of the general revenue sharing program. A project set up by CBOs collected data on abuses concerning allocation and misuse of funds. CBOs also worked to press for monitoring activities for Comprehensive Employment and Training Act programs. Other examples of CBO achievements are: a CBO in Yakima Valley, Washington, which addressed energy and employment problems by manufacturing alcohol from sweet potatoes to sell to an oil company; the Woodlawn Organization (employment and training programs in Chicago); the Watts Labor Community Action Committee (training and employment services for chronically unemployed individuals); and BUILD in Buffalo, New York, as well as the South Arsenol Need for Development organization in Hartford, Connecticut (alternative school programs). Examination of the experiences of CBOs and their successes can provide vocational educators with approaches for more effective vocational education programs that incorporate business acumen, people-orientation, command of the content of a program area, flexible operations, commitment to follow-through (job placement), and accountability to the neighborhood. (Questions and answers are appended.) (YLB)

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Occasional Paper No. 90

# THE EXPANDING ROLE OF COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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## FOREWORD

In these times of ever-increasing costs and ever-decreasing resources, cooperation is the key to the success in all educational endeavors in the United States. Each institution or organization, large or small, local or national, plays an indispensable role in both the education of our people and in the betterment of our country.

Through this occasional paper, we are pleased to share with you the comments of Mr. Othello Poulard, Director of Employment and Training and Vice-President of the Center for Community Change in Washington, D.C. In this paper, Mr. Poulard outlines the development of community-based organizations (CBOs) as indigenous responses to community problems that are otherwise either ignored or inadequately addressed by governmental concerns. He stresses the role of CBOs as productive change agents in some of the areas most relevant to vocational education: recruitment, job training, job development, and effective job placement. He also notes the importance of recognizing a functional partnership between CBOs and government in addressing the many issues surrounding poverty and unemployment in this country.

The National Center for Research in Vocational Education at The Ohio State University takes great pride in presenting *The Expanding Role of Community-based Organizations: Implications for Vocational Education*.

Robert E. Taylor
Executive Director
The National Center for Research
in Vocational Education

## THE EXPANDING ROLE OF COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

The term community-based organization (CBO) refers to the thousands of grass roots, neighborhood-based organizations that are established by and/or for poor and minority individuals in order to provide a service or advocate an issue related to their needs. These organizations came into existence because of some systemic problem(s), some chronic local circumstance. The CBOs are incorporated and have democratically elected boards of policymakers who legitimately represent the clientele they serve. The organizations are established to function both as operators of human service programs and as advocates for change. Such grass roots, community-based organizations are also geographically and ideologically near very poor and minority populations—people with the least hope of and the least chance for sensitive governmental responses to their problems and needs. The CBOs operate in a democratic context of accountability that involves the input of the people it represents.

Of course, this description of CBOs is an ideal profile. This configuration, these dynamics, and these organizational aspects are usually the factors that a community group *aims* to satisfy; and some do. Longstanding examples of responsive, stable CBOs of this kind do exist. Some include The Woodlawn Organization in Chicago; the Mississippi Action for Community Education in Greenville, Mississippi; The Watts Labor Community Action Committee in Watts, California; and the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation in Brownsville, New York. Here in Ohio, the Health Area Development Corporation in Cleveland was a viable CBO at one time; the Contact Center in Cincinnati still is. There are literally thousands of such groups around the country. I do not mean to slight local chapters of the Opportunities Industrialization Centers (OIC), local chapters of the Urban League, or local chapters of Project SER (Service Employment Redevelopment), but they are local chapters of organizations that are controlled nationally. My focus is on CBOs that exist in response to the dynamics which are current in their respective *local* neighborhoods.

Many government priorities differ from the concerns that community-based organizations might advocate. For example, a CBO position might be that it is an inherent federal government responsibility to help the needy, whereas the federal government often takes the position that such matters as national military defense represent the only real priority of government and that charitable organizations should help the poor. In fact, the government seldom takes stances that are not popular with the people who turn out to vote, or with upper income people who complain that they are overburdened by taxes. In such cases, a need is created for community-based organizations because of government's nonresponse (or insensitive response) to human needs.

Most members of community-based organizations understandably have a categorical mistrust of government commitment to program services on behalf of poor and minority individuals. But regardless of ineptness or nonexistent government commitment, community-based organizations are committed to providing program services, when they have ample resources. In fact, in filling these service roles, CBOs also create implications for vocational education, as well as for other domestic programs.

The charge that government ineptness generates a need for community-based organizations is, admittedly, broad. To clarify, let us examine the federal government's operation of the general revenue sharing program.

Congress and the U.S. Office of General Revenue Sharing have seemed content to let an array of abuses mount concerning the allocation and misuse of general revenue sharing (GRS) funds. In one county in New York, with the knowledge of the Office of General Revenue Sharing and of Congress, it was debated as to whether general revenue sharing funds should be allocated for birdhouses or tennis courts. In Yakima Valley, Washington, where poverty is rampant, there were extremely poor procedures for both accounting and accountability, resulting in similar misuse of the GRS funds. GRS funds were set aside to construct swimming pools in middle income communities, instead of being used to address the housing, health, or other pressing needs of poor residents. In fact, it was only in terms of an accounting procedure regarding reporting requirements that general revenue sharing funds were distinguished from general tax revenues. The federal government knew this, local units of government that got the money obviously knew it, and so did the local community-based organizations.

It was at the initiative of community-based organizations, supported by foundation grants, that a project was set up to monitor the operations of general revenue sharing in seventy-six jurisdictions around the country. The project collected data that were offered to the Congress when GRS was up for reauthorization, to show what was wrong with the program in terms of violations of the letter and the intent of the law. It took community-based organizations to make an issue of what was wrong with such a large, heavily funded federal program. It took the monitoring by and the relentless testimony of representatives and advocates from community-based organizations to prevail upon congressional subcommittees and committees, and eventually upon the full House and Senate, to get some of the current, more enlightened modifications adopted in the reauthorized GRS bill.

The misuse of Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) funds is another good example of government ineptness. In one year, in one Ohio city, 41 percent of all the dollars allocated to the CETA prime sponsor were spent to subsidize ongoing services of the city's government—the fire department, the police department, the sanitation department, and so forth. In many other cities around the country, there have been city managers who were paid the allowable salary levels under CETA with additional pay from local revenues. This was a gross abuse of CETA funds, which were originally mandated to address the needs of the chronically unemployed.

There have been many similar recitals on this subject. However, community-based organizations fought long and hard to press for monitoring activities of CETA and to help U.S. Department of Labor officials understand why eligibility criteria for CETA participants should be tightened. This campaign was not the CBOs' alone. The Brookings Institution and other organizations conducted many studies, and responsible officials in the Department of Labor also supported improved use of CETA funds. But community-based organizations were certainly in the forefront of these actions, on behalf of the individuals who should have been eligible for CETA. CBOs fought side by side with other organizations and individuals to prevail upon Congress and the Department of Labor to tighten up the CETA regulations and the CETA authorizing legislation, so that what Congress had written in the law would in fact be made operational at the local level.

Another example of an area in which CBOs are more effective and responsive than government is in addressing some of the energy problems in this country. One of this country's primary causes of inflation is our expenditure of so many American dollars overseas on crude oil,

which we buy primarily to operate motor vehicles. The federal government seems unable to recognize that this country can generate many jobs for people, keep the American dollar home, lessen the threat to our national security, and control the price of fuel for automobiles by manufacturing fuel-alcohol. Hitler based his World War II fuel economy on pure alcohol. In Brazil, one-sixth of the automobiles run on pure alcohol.

There is a community-based organization in Yakima Valley, Washington, that is headed by a man who, with $400,000 ($360,000 in grant funds from the Economic Development Administration and $60,000 from a commerical bank loan), set up a still. He uses thirty tons of cull (throwaway) sweet potatoes a day to manufacture 29,000 gallons of pure alcohol, which he then sells to a United States oil company. All of the poor folk in the Yakima Valley—teenagers or seniors on fixed income, unskilled individuals, and so forth—may grow and sell all the potatoes to this CBO that they care to, which guarantees a supplement to their income. Such programs address inflation and employment needs, because they ultimately create jobs. In time, the achievements of such community-based organizations may be recognized and may provide models for decision makers in the U.S. Department of Energy and other agencies.

Many other CBO achievements illustrate CBO functions, as well as their capacity for meaningful input into vocational education programs. One example is that of The Woodlawn Organization (TWO). During recent years, the highest incidents of unemployment in Chicago occurred in an area called Woodlawn. Employment and training programs operated by the city and other traditional organizations seemed unable to recruit, train, and place the hardcore unemployed in Woodlawn. TWO, however, succeeded.

One of the many employment and training programs that TWO operated involved TWO's going to large institutions that use microfilm, including hospitals, libraries, and so forth. TWO proposed a joint arrangement between it and the concerned institutions that involved the joint acquisition of necessary training equipment, design of the curriculum, and establishment of the measurements and standards for participants in a training program for technicians to process and handle microfilm. Almost to the person, every graduate of this training program was placed in a well-paying job with one of the participating institutions.

Another CBO, the Watts Labor Community Action Committee (WLCAC) in Los Angeles, California, had substantial success in training and finding employment for chronically unemployed individuals. In addressing the housing and employment crisis in Watts, which is known as a poor area of Los Angeles, WLCAC packaged an arrangement involving local and state CETA dollars, state housing funds, skilled (but unemployed) craftspersons from organized labor, and hundreds of unemployed residents of Watts to create a massive, highly successful, internationally publicized housing program. In short, WLCAC moved hundreds of single family homes to Watts from other parts of Los Angeles, such as from an area near the airport where airport expansion was scheduled to occur, and from the site for the expansion of Century Boulevard Expressway. Once these hundreds of homes were relocated in Watts, CETA workers enrolled in the WLCAC job-training/housing program worked under the supervision of the union craftspersons to reassemble and make the houses habitable. These houses, which range in value from $85,000 to $150,000, were formerly inhabited by wealthy individuals. Now they are occupied by low income individuals who will own them after twenty years' occupancy. Units of government or traditional employment and training organizations are not known for achieving such feats, but a CBO did it!

These examples illustrate a crucial strength of local organizations: they have proven their capacity to perceive problems directly and to propose practical remedies.

Currently, one of the major problems in urban areas is the high rate of school dropouts. There is a community-based organization in Buffalo, New York, called BUILD, which, because of the public school system's incapacity to hold the interest of many of the high school students, has established an alternative school program. BUILD negotiated an arrangement with the school board in Buffalo to set up two academies, called BUILD academies. Today, after a decade of operation, these academies are so successful that their students' achievement test scores are higher than the mean scores of students graduating from the public schools. There is a waiting list of parents who want to enroll their children in the BUILD academies.

Another instance of a community-based organization recognizing a need and having the commitment to intervene effectively is the South Arsenol Need for Development (SAND) organization, in Hartford, Connecticut. SAND sponsors an operation similar to the BUILD project, with the cooperation of the Hartford Public Schools. Students in the SAND school program also score higher on standardized tests than do graduates of the regular public school programs.

Perhaps the thoughtfulness and relevance in the CBOs' curriculum designs, personal counseling, and teaching processes explain how these community-based organizations succeed where public school systems do not. Perhaps the exemplary track record of CBO training activities is explained by the fact that CBO personnel are not merely employees of a bureaucracy, they are part of a neighborhood-based institution and are often on intimate terms with the clients. Perhaps being so close to the groups they serve gives CBOs the knowledge and commitment to design programs that are truly responsive to client needs.

It is very important to stress, however, that community-based organizations' programs do not operate to compete with the bureaucracy. They are in business, in part, to advocate areas and demonstrate means by which the established systems can do a better job of what they are supposed to be doing. Pointing out the successes of the BUILD academies in Buffalo and the SAND schools in Hartford is not meant to suggest that CBOs can or should replace the public schools, but it is clear that their demonstration activities do provide effective models that school systems should incorporate into their ongoing programs.

Such experiences of community-based organizations obviously have relevance for meaningful CBO participation in vocational education. Indeed, the employment and training programs operated by TWO or WLCAC are akin to vocational education, and have implications for it. Placement through TWO's program was 100 percent of its graduates. The recruitment effort, the relevance of the content, the demeanor of the instructors, and the provision of support services all came together because of the unique character of the CBO sponsor. Generally, traditional institutions fall far short of this sort of result because their approach and format are not adequately tailored to their program participants. Given the situational dynamics in Watts, California, only a community-based organization such as WLCAC would have cared enough, been practical enough, and tailored its program enough to succeed as it did.

This is not to say that in every instance, or even in most instances, community-based organizations can perform miracles. But if vocational educators will consider the experiences of community-based organizations and examine the ingredients of certain successful programs, they might uncover valuable approaches for more effective and enlightened vocational education operations in the future. Community-based organizations have demonstrated the business acumen, the people-orientation, the command of the content of a program area, the flexible operations of the training program, the commitment to follow-through with a program for the placement of graduates, and the accountability back to the neighborhood that may be critical to program success.

Unfortunately, people with economic and political influence at federal and local levels often fail to advocate such roles for community-based organizations. They also fail to support the concept of writing CBO participation into the legal statutes and regulatory guidelines of programs designed to help the poor. Community-based organizations often burn up much of their resources trying to sell themselves to decision makers after legislation has already been written and after money has already been appropriated. They have the almost impossible task of trying to convince jealous traditional program operators that they can deliver what is needed, and that they do have a track record of demonstrated effectiveness.

Decision makers must come to understand that community-based organizations can function as effective partners with almost any level of governmental or institutional program operation. Such partnerships can enhance the likelihood that relevant support services and flexible (yet substantive) training are delivered to those who are in true need of them. Community-based organizations have repeatedly demonstrated the capacity to be responsive in these areas. They exist in adequate numbers in almost all regions of the country, and they have proven to many domestic programmers—including vocational educators—that they are competent partners in program planning, monitoring, research, and operations.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**Othello W. Poulard**

**Question:** In situations where both community-based organizations and established school systems are present, it is often an either/or situation: either the school is going to solve a problem or the CBO is going to do it. The two types of agencies do not often get together on a cooperative basis. Can you identify any models of effective linkage between CBOs and secondary schools—or elementary schools, for that matter—where responsibility is shared?

With regard to linkage between a CBO and a public school institution, where both are simultaneously attempting to address various student needs, I'll cite encouraging experiences in Buffalo and Hartford. But, even in those cases, it was only in their beginning stages, I suppose, that linkages and discrete areas of service were shared by the two parties. Initially, it was done jointly; now it is done singularly, with the students served either by the CBO or the school.

I do know that when community-based organizations participated on the Vice-President's Task Force on Youth Employment last year, CBOs were very convincing in saying that, given the configuration and the expected outcomes of the administration's program for youth employment, they could work as partners with public school systems in recruitment, outreach, support services, on-the-job training, and in serving on what was then called the "on-site council" (which was supposed to draft a given school's proposal for consideration for funding). But that was merely a projection by CBOs regarding the roles they wanted to assume and how they saw themselves working with a local school in a given area. Aside from the SAND schools and the BUILD academies, I cannot recall a single instance of the responsibilities being shared between a CBO and a public school program.

**Question:** One of the few laws of social organization seems to be that organizations that originate with great vitality, flexibility, and innovativeness eventually begin to suffer a form of deterioration. CBOs certainly seem to start out as vital, dynamic organizations. Do you think that the CBOs will eventually become part of the "establishment"—that is, like all other organizations in any society? In other words, what can be done to make CBOs different, to prove that the laws of social change and social organization are really not pertinent to CBOs?

In some ways I acknowledge that the predicament you cite has already victimized some community-based organizations. Some of the staff at the Center for Community Change, which is a technical assistance provider, are working with CBOs that appear to have become swallowed up by the establishment. They have been co-opted by the establishment, even though at one time they considered themselves citizens' advocates and complained that streets in their part of town were not being paved, that schools were not adequate, that trash collection was not adequate, and that a complete range of social services was not being provided.

Having acknowledged that, however, I must now proceed to argue that, in most instances, CBOs have not given in. They continue to argue for positive social change. There is an

accountability that the geographical proximity and the history of an organization engender in the minds of area residents. These factors also hold a community-based organization accountable. When area residents see community groups as irrelevant to their needs, in terms of program operations or of advocacy, there is a tendency on the part of area residents—sometimes in their capacity as board members, sometimes in their capacity as neglected people (first neglected by "city hall" and now potentially by a CBO)—to rebuke the CBO and spur it to action, as the CBO once did to "city hall."

I think that these activities will hold CBOs in check. They will now be accountable to the residents, who know why the CBOs came into existence, why they are supposed to be seeking money, and why they are supposed to be running programs. I also feel that there is a genuine commitment on the part of the CBO executive directors and boards of directors. Some unusual individuals have, despite extreme personal and financial sacrifice, managed community-based organizations. These people could be in private industry making much more money and enhancing their reputations, but instead they serve as volunteers on boards in order to see the right thing done for the needy persons in their community. That aspect of sensitivity, of conscience, and of commitment on behalf of the "down-and-out," along with the neighborhood's knowledge of what the CBOs mission is, will continue to make CBOs function very well. But I also think CBOs will eventually counter the "inevitable deterioration" of which you spoke.

**Question:** Why are SERs (Service Employment Redevelopment), the Urban League, and OICs (Opportunities Industrialization Centers) so prominent in the literature of vocational education, and why are other CBOs not so prominent?

The organizations you mentioned are prominent ones. The influence of Vernon Jordan or Leon Sullivan (the respective heads of these two organizations), the influence of their national offices, and the influence of their national chairpersons or their national directors have an impact that benefits even the local chapters of OICs, SERs, and the Urban League. This reputation for excellent national leadership puts them in good stead when, as local chapters, they go to CETA prime sponsors or to local vocational education units to ask for money to buy costly equipment for training programs. They succeed in getting more money. They have been doing it longer. They are effective in their public relations.

However, a case needs to be made for the unaffiliated, community-based organization that does not have the advantages I just listed. For every city in which you find one local operation of OIC, you are likely to find twenty-five independent, unaffiliated community-based organizations—ten of them seriously intent on their work and purpose. These ten, by virtue of their networking with people who need training, do an excellent job of training. My commitment, therefore, is to help awaken vocational education decision makers and others to the need for these groups to become known through their literature, to be funded, and so forth.

**Question:** Does the independent, community-based organization have the same definition as the larger ones? Is it correct to say that the larger ones are CBOs and anything smaller is considered a community action agency of some sort?

A community action agency (CAA), formerly called a community action program (CAP), should be understood as being a product of what you used to call the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). It is now the Community Services Administration (CSA). Community action agencies are related to a unit of government in the same way that local SERs, local OICs, and the local Urban League are to their national parent organizations. OEO created community action emphasis. Most CAA agencies get the bulk of their money from government sources to run an assortment of programs. I do not equate CAAs with CBOs because of the CAAs' unique origins and their

current ties to a federal funding source, the Community Services Administration. And again, I mean to reinforce the importance of the independent, unaffiliated community-based organizations, which are often slighted because they do not conduct public relations efforts, have no national organization, and have no formal ties with any federal agency.

**Question:** How do these organizations continue to justify their existence?

I find it easy to justify the continued existence of CBOs that are true to their mission and true to their calling. Too many neighborhoods are pockets of poverty, and in too many communities there is benign neglect on the part of municipal, township, county, or state governments. If it were true that there were many instances of individuals having their housing needs addressed by organization "A," and also organization "B," and also by organization "C," I would agree that there are too many CBOs. If it were not for the fact that one quarter of the people eligible for food stamps do not know it and therefore are not using them, I would say that too many CBOs are running food stamp outreach programs. If chronically unemployed people could find jobs easily, I would agree that there is no need in the same town for an OIC, an Urban League, an independent CBO, and a CAA. However, as I note a rapid increase in unemployment, as I note ever-increasing needs in the areas of housing and health services, and as I note no signals from units of government saying that they recognize the increases in all these areas of human need and will operate in a manner that will improve the situation, I cannot be critical of the plethora of CBOs. They are needed, and it seldom happens that a single community-based organization maintains service programs for an entire town. A CBO may be advocating answers to issues which, if successful, would benefit the entire town, but they usually maintain services to address the human needs of people in their part of town only. Given the continual increase rather than decrease of human need, I think that the existence of a large number of CBOs is justified.

**Question:** It seems to me that, at the federal level at least, we are witnessing a decline in government sensitivity to CBOs, which is going to be translated into fewer federal dollars going to support causes for the poor and disadvantaged in our society. What are your feelings about possible consequences of this declining sensitivity? Do you see violent revolution as the only alternative, or even as a viable alternative? What other alternatives do you see as ways in which the community might be able to respond to the needs of the people?

I think the consequences are grave, but at this point I am not entertaining thoughts of violent revolution. I think we are going to see a variety of different dynamics surfacing soon, but I do not know what the ultimate consequences of these dynamics will be. I think that the real and imagined fears that the poor and the advocates of the poor feel will cause these groups to coalesce more than they have in recent years.

Organizing was easier during the sixties. The civil rights movement had a charismatic leader, Martin Luther King, Jr., who was able to travel to every city and meet with every ministerial alliance. Students in college were interested in the serious issues involved in the civil rights movement. There were labor unions interested in the movement. At that time, there was a president who made a moral issue of civil rights. All of these things, in the aggregate, made a difference. Newspaper reporters were curious and intent upon incidents, and the American public was responsive to issues of conscience.

That era is over. Now there are no charismatic leaders such as Martin Luther King. Our president does not have the same kinds of moral perceptions that John Kennedy had. College students today are more worried about the future job market than about civil rights. So it has been hard to continue the effort in the seventies and eighties.

I think President Reagan's budget cuts will push the advocates of the poor and the poor themselves to see the need for organization. I think that this forthcoming organization will, among other things, address issues that have been neglected or that have not been addressed adequately, such as voter registration and voter turnout. I think that there will be occasional outbursts in some cities. I think Mr. Reagan was not so much concerned for the poor as he was for potential outbursts of violence when he decided to keep the summer youth program alive. But I predict that there will be a great many unmet needs, including housing and jobs, that could be met by such programs as Public Service Employment. I see advocates of the poor and the poor themselves organizing to meet these needs. I see the organizations becoming very political, very concerned with voter registration.

**Question:** Do you, then, accept the assumption that there is a decline in sensitivity to the needs of the poor and disadvantaged? Or is it perhaps a sobering recognition that you cannot be all things to all people?

The answer is yes to your first question. I do think there is a categorical decline in the sensitivity of the federal government to poor people. I think the voters in this country who are not the truly poor have said that they are tired of increasing taxes. We are all tired of inflation. I think the voters simplistically believe that a reduction in federal spending will address inflation, and I think that the current administration is being rather obvious and deliberate in addressing the mandate that it feels it has from the people. The people, the voters, were not voting on the basis of choosing a candidate who showed more sensitivity to the poor. They were voting on the issues of inflation, taxes, and defense, and these are not the same as poverty issues. So I do see a decline in the sensitivity shown the poor by the current administration. I think it is hard to miss.

Mr. Reagan's rationale sounds like the classical Republican ideology, which I will describe the way Democrats do: Feed the horse, the horse will leave some droppings, and the birds will eat out of the droppings. That is, you make big industry strong through tax relief of various sorts so that industry can expand and hire people, and therefore the poor and anybody else who truly wants to work can find jobs. But one has to question whether or not our age of modern technology will—if industry does expand—truly employ chronically unemployed people, even at the level that Public Service Employment did under CETA. I doubt it. The mandate that the administration had from the voters was very clear. It was from people who were concerned about the price of college courses for their children, about the cost of dining out at a restaurant, about the purchase price of a house. These are legitimate concerns, and I do not mean to mock those who have them. But if Mr. Reagan has no mandate from the poor, then he cannot respond to one. It is understandable that he is not responding. It is also unfortunate that he is not.

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